

Matthew 1:18-25

Surprise!

Please turn to Matthew 1

Surprise

My nephew Tyler's wife Mary Rose works for a company called "The Knot"

All about marriage, etc.

From her I learned about something called a "Gender Reveal" party

Apparently in the last 10 years or so this has become very popular

A party where you reveal the gender of your child to your family and friends

Sounds fun

And there are many different ways to do it, like...

OVERHEAD

- Handing out candy customized Hershey candy bars with either the "H-E" in Hershey highlighted or "S-H-E" highlighted in the name HERSHEY
 - I've heard of White cake with pink or blue icing inside
 - Pinata & Balloon pops with pink or blue confetti inside
- Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz this week instagrammed his gender reveal by skeet shooting a football filled with pink powder

- But the one that takes the cake...

OVERHEAD

- In Arizona, a wife used an exploding box to reveal that they were having a boy
- But it went terribly wrong and sparked a wildfire that burned 47,000 acres and caused more than \$8 million in damage!
 - Just think of how they felt...

❖ Now...

- Just think of the surprise Mary and Joseph felt

- When each of them learned about the pregnancy!
 - Look with me at Chapter 1, verses 18-19...
 - **READ 1:18-19**
- ❖ They say there are 2 kinds of people in the world
 - Those who like surprises and those who don't
 - Growing up my sister wanted to know all the presents she was getting
 - I, on the other hand, wanted to be surprised
- ❖ Christmas, in part at least, is about surprises
 - And the first Christmas had 3 of them

The first surprise is obvious...

A Surprising Pregnancy

OVERHEAD

- ❖ This was certainly a Surprise for Mary
 - Matthew doesn't record her reaction...
 - But Luke does!
 - Mary is shocked and says...
 - "How could this be since I am a virgin?"
 - She was not only shocked, but confused too
 - Luke later records that Mary...
 - "... treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."
 - Mary was obviously still processing what was happening to her
 - And so was Joseph...
- ❖ In v. 19 we have Joseph reaction to this surprising pregnancy
 - He decides to divorce her quietly
 - Here a little historical background is necessary

- **(Explain divorce - Jewish betrothal system)**

- Arranged marriages, Betrothal for a year very serious
- So serious was that commitment that a certificate of divorce was necessary

❖ So Joseph decides to give her a certificate of divorce privately...quietly

❖ Joseph has been nicknamed in church history "Quiet Joseph"

- Because he never utters a word in Scripture
 - But his actions speak very loudly as to who he is

❖ We see that...**Joseph was a Just man**

- By deciding to divorce Mary he was showing that he was unwilling to sweep her sin under the rug
 - The only possibility as Joseph saw it was that...
 - Mary had sinned
 - She slept with another man while engaged to him
 - Imagine if that happened to you!
 - How would you react?!

❖ But by deciding to divorce Mary

- He showed that he refused to become complicit in her sin by ignoring it
 - Something had to be done
 - So being Just, he decides to divorce her
 - To show, in a quiet way, that Mary had sinned against him

❖ But Joseph shows incredible Mercy here as well

- He decides to divorce her quietly
 - He knew that Dt 22 required a severe punishment for this sin

- Actually required the death penalty
- But Joseph wanted to show mercy as well
 - So he does it quietly
- ❖ What we see here through Joseph is a very Godly character
 - A balance between Justice and Mercy
 - In Ex 34:6-7 we read...
 - (God is) compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...
 - God always perfectly balances those

APP

- ❖ And he calls his people to do that as well in all aspects of their lives...
 - When sharing the Gospel
 - *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience (1 Peter 3:15-16)*
 - The Justice of the Gospel balanced with mercy
 - We are called to do this when we speak into each other's lives
 - Eph 4:15 calls us to
 - ...speak the truth in love into each other's lives
 - Justice and mercy mixed together
- ❖ We are to be those kinds of people...
 - Because we are called to be like the God we serve
 - Who always balances Justice and Mercy perfectly
 - We see this in the cross of Christ

- Jesus went to the cross to fulfill the justice of God
 - Sin has to be punished
 - That's the Law
 - Someone has to pay for sin
 - Either you or Jesus
 - There must be Justice
- Yet...
 - Through Jesus' death Mercy is extended
 - The guilty spared
 - The sinner saved
 - The prisoner freed
 - In the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 - Justice and Mercy meet

❖ Isaac Watts captured this in his Hymn “When I survey the wondrous cross”

- See from His head, His hands, His feet,
- Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
- Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
- Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

❖ The wonder of the cross is that Justice and Mercy meet in such a profound way

❖ And that is what Joseph is trying to do here...

❖ But...

- Just as Joseph is ready to proceed with his plan
 - He gets another surprise when an angel appears to him in a dream
 - And tells him a surprising Truth

Surprising Truth

OVERHEAD

❖ Look @ v. 20

- But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit’

❖ The surprise is...

- Mary had not sinned at all!
 - The Holy Spirit caused Jesus’ “Genesis”
 - That is the word translated ‘birth’ in v. 18
 - Also translated “Genealogy” in v. 1
- This is the Genesis of Jesus
 - And the Holy Spirit is the cause of Mary’s pregnancy
 - And that is a surprising truth for Joseph
 - And us!

❖ The Scriptures are VERY circumspect and specific in the way they talk about this

- God uses phrases like...
 - “From the Holy Spirit’...Twice here
 - In Luke...
 - “The HS will come upon you”
 - “...overshadow you”

❖ We have to be as careful here as God’s Word is in keeping the boundaries as to what is meant

- In the 1970’s there a flurry of movies having to do with Satan and the Antichrist
 - The Omen...The Exorcist
 - And there was ‘Rosemary’s Baby’
 - It was a movie about the anti-christ being born by a woman named Rose Mary

- In it the writers mimic Jesus' virgin birth narrative
 - But the writers imply that Satan sleeps with Rose Mary
 - Much like the Greek and Roman gods used to come down from mount Olympus
- I heard of a pastor who went to a Christmas eve service when he was a brand-new Christian and the pastor insinuated that the angel romantically wooed Mary
 - There are crazy and untrue ideas out there!

❖ That is **NOT** how Jesus was conceived at all

- The Scriptures are *clear about the mystery*, if we can say that
 - The Holy Spirit is the cause of Mary's pregnancy
- The early church struggled with this mystery
 - And we read what they came up with earlier in the Nicene Creed
 - *For us and for our salvation (Jesus) came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human.*
 - Just as the HS "hovered" above the waters in Genesis 1 and helped make earth, earth
 - Just as He "opens our eyes" and...
 - Makes unbelievers into believers
 - Makes Doubters into Disciples
 - Makes non-Christians into Christians
- So...
 - He "overshadowed" Mary and made the 2nd person of the Godhead...Human!

- The Spirit was at work in Creation, Regeneration and the Incarnation
 - That is the surprising truth that Joseph was told!

St. Augustine pondering this wrote...

God became a man for this purpose: since you, a human being, could not reach God, but you can reach other humans, you might now reach God through a man... God became a man so that following a man—something you are able to do—you might reach God, which was formerly impossible to you.

❖ What a surprising and merciful truth

- God knew you and I could never reach him
 - We could never be good enough, sacrificial enough or generous enough
 - So he sent Jesus to be “enough” for us
 - He was good enough...lived a perfect life
 - He was sacrificial enough...He took your sins upon himself
 - He was generous enough...He offers you forgiveness and a healed relationship with God the Father
 - If you follow him...
 - You see...
 - By believing in Jesus...
 - We actually reach God
 - We actually have a restored relationship with God
 - By following Jesus...
 - We are invited into God’s family

❖ Larry Crabb in his book *Connecting*, writes:

A friend of mine was raised in an angry family. Mealtimes were either silent or sarcastically noisy. Down the street was an old-fashioned house with a big porch

where a happy family lived. My friend told me that when he was about ten, he began excusing himself from his dinner table as soon as he could without being yelled at, and walking to the old-fashioned house down the street.

If he arrived during dinnertime, he would crawl under the porch and just sit there, listening to the sounds of laughter.

When he told me this story, I asked him to imagine what it would have been like if the father in the house somehow knew he was huddled beneath the porch and sent his son to (crawl under the porch and) invite him in.

❖ That is what God is doing through Jesus

- God sent Jesus to crawl under the porch and ask us to follow him inside
 - Where there are no tears...no yelling...no anger...
 - Only love and laughter and acceptance

❖ That's what Christmas is...

- Jesus coming out to invites us in!
 - So, if you are outside...come in
 - Trust Jesus...follow Jesus back into the house that you were made to inhabit

The last surprise we have here is...

A Surprising Name

OVERHEAD

❖ Look @ v. 21-25 (**READ**)

❖ Here we have two names mentioned for Jesus

- The first is "Jesus"

❖ The angel instructs Joseph to name Mary's son Jesus

- Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua

- Joshua meaning “Yahweh saves”...”God Saves”
 - Which makes sense of the explanation by the angel
 - “Because he will save his people from their sins”

- ❖ The surprise for Joseph is that...
 - This is the Messiah!
 - The one whom the Jews have been anticipating
 - And he will not be a political Messiah
 - But a spiritual one

- ❖ The Jews, much like us, were always looking for a political Messiah
 - That is why politics is such a hot issue in our culture
 - People are looking for the next president to be their messiah-savior
 - If we can only get the right person into office...
 - Everything will be OK
 - The world will be righted
 - There will be justice and peace and prosperity

- ❖ That is much like what the Jews were anticipating in their Messiah
 - A political savior
 - That would restore their kingdom
 - That would kick the Romans out
 - That would make this world OK again
 - Their “Felt Need” was a political one
 - Save us from Roman oppression

APP

- ❖ We are very much like the Jews
 - Many expect Jesus to save us from our felt needs

❖ Like bad circumstances

- Many people look to Jesus to save them from their bad circumstances in their lives
 - That's what health/wealth false teachers will tell you
 - Those false teachers will tell you...
 - "Come to Jesus and your life will be better"
- But...
 - We don't need saved from our circumstances

❖ Others look to Jesus to save them from their bad behavior

- This is what the legalists offer
 - Come to Jesus and you will be a nicer person
 - They teach that Jesus' leads in a more moral way of living
 - It sounds nice to love your neighbor
 - It feels good to be sacrificially generous
 - The Golden rule used to hang in the Pemetic hallways
- But...
 - We don't need saved from our bad manners and poor social graces

❖ Still others look to Jesus to save them from their fear

- They are scared of what is beyond death
 - They want some sort of comfort, solace, guarantee...
 - Some sort of insurance
- But...
 - We don't need saved from our fear

❖ There are many other felt needs that people look to Jesus to save them from

- But what God says is our most dire need is...

- To be saved from our sins
- ❖ You see...
 - According to Scripture...
 - Unforgiven sin has the ability to...
 - Barr you from a relationship with God
 - And in the Bible, that is called Death
 - No relationship means death
- ❖ If you have even had a long-term deep relationship end
 - It feels like death
 - I have talked to people that have gone through divorces
 - And they describe it in those terms...
 - It feels like a death
- ❖ You may not feel it...
 - It might not be high on your felt-needs list...
 - But God's word is telling you and me today
 - The most important need in your life is
 - To be saved from death
 - To be forgiven of your sin
- ❖ And that is what Christmas is all about
 - The solution to our most pressing problem is born
 - Jesus...God saves...is born
- ❖ And the best thing of all is
 - That when you accept God's son Jesus
 - You get everything else too

❖ Jesus told his disciples one day...

○ *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well* (Matt 6:33)

▪ That means that when you trust Jesus to forgive your sins

• It does not clear up all your circumstances...

○ But they begin to be used in your life

• It does not make you a perfect person...

○ But the Spirit begins to change you from the inside out

• It does not take away all your fears...

○ But there is a guarantee that you will be with your father in paradise forever

❖ You see...

○ When you accept forgiveness from the son...you get it all

Years ago, there was a very wealthy man who had a passion for collecting art. He eventually collected priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet and many others. They adorned the walls of his mansion. The mans' son went off to serve in the first World War and was killed. In memory of his son, he had a portrait of him painted and he hung it in the most prominent place in his house, above the fireplace, where he could see it every day.

The years went on and the old man eventually died.

Without an heir, the paintings were sent to auction. Art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings.

The auction began with a painting that was not on any museum's list. It was the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid. The room was silent.

"Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked. Minutes passed. No one spoke. From the back of the room came, "Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son. Let's forget it and go on to the good stuff."

More voices echoed in agreement.

the auctioneer replied "No, we have to sell this one first. Now, who will take the son?" Finally, a friend of the old man spoke, "Will you take ten dollars for the painting? That's all I have. I knew the boy, so I'd like to have it."

"I have ten dollars. Will anyone go higher?" called the auctioneer. After more silence, the auctioneer said, "Going once, going twice. Gone." The gavel fell, cheers filled the room and someone exclaimed, "Now we can get on with it and get to the good stuff!"

The auctioneer looked at the audience and announced the auction was over.

Stunned disbelief quieted the room. Someone spoke up and asked, "What do you mean it's over? We didn't come here for a picture of some old guy's son. What about all of these paintings? There are millions of dollars of art here! I demand that you explain what's going on here!"

The auctioneer replied, "It's very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son...gets it all."